

Spires Academy

Bredlands Lane, Sturry, Canterbury, CT2 0HD

Inspection dates 23–24 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement is uneven across the academy. It is slower in mathematics than in other subjects and many boys do not make good progress.
- Too much teaching requires improvement. Many lessons fail to engage learners enough to achieve their full potential.
- Some students do not show good attitudes to learning. On a few occasions, a small minority of students disrupt the learning of others.
- Literacy skills are not developed well across the academy to support students' learning and achievement.
- Assessment is not effective in raising standards of students' work. Work is too often graded inaccurately. Students are not given enough opportunities to improve or extend their learning through acting on feedback from teachers.
- Attendance is well below average.
- Many senior and subject leaders are relatively new to their responsibilities. With governors, collectively, leaders have not yet made a measurable impact on the quality of teaching and its impact on students' achievements through their checking procedures.

The school has the following strengths

- The creative arts provision and achievement is good. The learning opportunities promote the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Achievement has risen in 2012 dramatically to meet the national average and, in particular, students make good progress in English.
- The new purpose-built building and its facilities help students with their learning.
- Students are friendly, polite and the large majority behave well around the academy. Many feel safe while at the academy.
- The executive principal and principal are providing decisive leadership in driving the academy forward.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited 28 lessons, observing 27 teachers. Twelve lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also conducted a series of further brief observations of learning and conducted a scrutiny of students' work.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, governors, some trustees and sponsors of the academy, the senior leadership team and staff.
- Inspectors took account of the 21 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 24 staff questionnaire responses.
- Inspectors observed the academy's work and looked at improvement plans, records and analyses of students' behaviour, the tracking of pupils' progress and examples of students' work. They scrutinised the academy's attendance figures and monitoring information.

Inspection team

Raymond Lau, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Ann Short

Additional Inspector

Anthony Felsenstein

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this academy

- This is a smaller-than-average secondary academy. Almost all students are from a White British background and speak English as their first language.
- The number of pupils supported by the pupil premium is above the national average. This is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children in the care of the local authority, and those who have a parent serving in the armed forces.
- The proportion of students supported by School Action, School Action Plus and students with a statement of special educational needs are high. Many of these students have behaviour, emotional and social difficulties and/or are classified within the Autistic Spectrum Disorder.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A very small number of students are educated off-site, particularly in construction.
- The executive principal was appointed in April 2012. The principal took up post in September 2012. Two vice principals and an assistant vice-principal took up post in January 2013. A range of subject leaders are new to their posts, including the head of English who joined the academy in April 2013.
- The academy moved into its purpose-built building in September 2012.
- There is collaborative partnership between Simon Langton Girls Grammar School and the academy. The academy is sponsored by Kent County Council, Crown Products and Holiday Extras.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to at least good, by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently plan and deliver lessons that stimulate and challenge all students in order to improve attitudes to learning
 - making sure that students' work and the levels at which tasks are set are rigorously assessed and this information is used to move students' learning on at a quick pace
 - increasing opportunities for students to develop and apply their literacy skills in different subjects.
- Accelerate the rates of progress to consistently good, especially for boys and in mathematics, through:
 - ensuring that the learning opportunities stimulate and meet the needs of all learners and in particular, boys
 - increasing the level of challenge, especially in mathematics
 - students responding to the comments made by teachers to correct any misunderstandings and common mistakes
- Embed leadership and management processes so they have a greater impact on the quality of education and students' achievements by:
 - leaders, managers and the governing body setting and monitoring targets that are suitably challenging for all students and holding staff to account for the performance of their students.
- Raise attendance to the national average

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Progress in mathematics is much slower than in English. In many subjects such as geography, Religious Education and French, students' progress requires improvement. Boys do not consistently make good progress across the academy. Students reach attainment in English that is similar to the national average, but their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills are not consistently developed across all subjects.
- Students enter the academy from very low starting points. In 2012, 49% of students achieved the highest grades possible for GCSE. This is a considerable rise from the previous year and represents attainment that is in line with the national average. Early entry to GCSE examinations has not been fully effective in improving students' achievement. A significant number do not achieve the grades expected of them and they are often not stretched to attain the higher grades.
- The proportion of students making the progress expected of them in English and mathematics is similar to the national averages. Similarly, the proportion of students making good progress in English matches the national average. This is a result of effective teaching. However, this is not the case in mathematics as students are not consistently challenged enough to make good progress.
- The progress of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is improving. In 2012, they achieving a grade almost lower in GCSE English and Mathematics examinations when compared to students who are not eligible for this funding. As a result of a wide range of strategies and intervention, including the use of digital technology (for example computer tablets) to support learning, the gaps in the performance of students are closing, especially in English and mathematics.
- The Year 7 catch-up premium is used effectively to fund a range of strategies targeted towards improving literacy and numeracy work for those falling behind. This has resulted in less than one average point score difference in English and mathematics against their peers.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their peers because of effective targeted support and a range of programmes that are accelerating their progress. For example, in a Year 11 humanities lesson, students demonstrated good gains in their knowledge and understanding from effective deployment of support staff who challenged them to think. Students gave their views of recent events, justifying their moral and ethical perspectives well.
- Students educated off-site on the construction course achieve well. In addition, this strengthens their attitudes to learning and their enjoyment. Achievement in the creative arts specialism is particularly strong.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- There is too much teaching that requires improvement, and some that is inadequate. Very little teaching is outstanding. This is partially due to staffing issues which have affected negatively the quality of teaching and the quality of students' learning and progress.

- Where teaching is not as effective, there is a lack of clarity in what the students are learning. The activities do not match the needs of all learners as many students do the same work. This results in students not being stimulated and becoming disinterested. On occasions, teachers over-direct lessons by talking too much, leading to the pace of learning being slow and some students becoming restless. This limits students' progress and does not stretch them to achieve more. There are opportunities missed to develop students' literacy skills in these lessons. Some students and parents stated that homework is not consistently set.
- There are pockets of good marking and specific feedback to students in their books but this quality of assessment is not consistent across the academy. Students do not always know what they have to do in order to improve to the next level. Where teachers do invest time in writing suitable comments, students do not reply to the feedback, or are not given the opportunity to correct their mistakes. The presentation skills of some students are weak and the opportunities to develop their literacy skills are underdeveloped across the academy.
- In the main, teachers have developed strong and trusting relationships with their students. Teachers are keen for their students to do well and give the students many opportunities to use computer tablets in lessons, trusting them to use the internet and other applications safely to support their learning.
- In lessons where teaching is judged to be good, this is characterised by:
 - teachers planning a good range of activities that meet the needs of almost all learners;
 - students clearly knowing what, and how they will learn and measuring their progress;
 - teachers asking effective questions, making students think and developing their understanding;
 - timed, short activities that help students to work independently, or in small groups.
- In an outstanding Year 10 dance lesson, all of these characteristics were evident. Students were learning about dance technique and interpretative skills. The teacher modelled excellence to a very high level of competence and had very high expectations. The pace was rapid and students took responsibility for their learning by leading different parts of the lesson. This enabled the teacher to support and guide students to learn more effectively. As a result, students made exceptional progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The academy has implemented a range of targeted strategies and interventions to improve attendance. Leaders are proactive in tackling the attendance of students who are deemed to be persistently absent but attendance remains below the national average. Nevertheless, while there are some small signs of improvement, the impact of initiatives is yet to be fully measured.
- Students' attitudes to learning are not consistently strong and are linked to the quality of teaching they receive. They say that they enjoy lessons that are practical and where they are actively involved in their learning. This includes those students educated off-site on the construction course. On occasions, where teaching is not as effective, many students behave well, because they have a strong work ethic but there is a very small minority of students who, on occasion, disrupt the learning of others.
- Students feel safe at the academy. They appreciate the brand new purpose-built facility and enjoy the opportunities to interact well with different year groups. A few parents say that bullying occurs. Students state that bullying is rare, but when it happens it is dealt with

effectively. They are aware of the different types of bullying, including homophobia. Students have a good understanding of internet safety and of how to protect themselves.

- Students make good contributions to the academy. The proactive school council ensures that suitable and relevant suggestions are made and acted upon. The students show initiative in hosting events and raising money for a range of charities.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- All senior leaders and many subject leaders are new in post. A range of policies, activities and initiatives have been implemented to manage the work of the academy. It is far too early to see the full impact of these actions on the students' performance. The executive principal and principal work well together and are supported by the vice principals in driving achievement and the operations of the academy. Nevertheless, there has been instability in staffing which has slowed the progress of students in some subjects.
- The self-evaluation is broadly accurate. Leaders and the governing body clearly know the strengths and areas of weakness and are taking positive steps to address the key areas.
- The assessment system lacks rigour. The current target setting does not sufficiently challenge students to consistently make good progress. Data is used more sharply in English, but in mathematics and some other subjects, it is much weaker. This has led to some teachers over-generously grading students' levels of achievement and has given an inaccurate picture of how well the students are performing in some subjects. The academy is working on promoting the equality of opportunity and is now tackling discrimination through the performance of different groups of learners, including that of boys.
- Variations in opportunities have affected which subjects students are able to study. This has created some imbalance across year groups. Changes to the timetable have been made to create a greater level of consistency across the academy. Leaders are aware of the disruption caused by these changes to the teaching and learning for the students and are taking effective steps to minimise further disruption.
- The academy adequately promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A qualification in equality and diversity enables students to be prepared more effectively for working in a more democratic Britain and global society. The academy proudly hosts its annual dance showcase that involves a large number of students and a wide range of primary and secondary schools from across the county.
- The academy demonstrates the capacity for improvement. The focus on English, creative arts and mathematics has successfully led to a rise in attainment. This year, fixed-term exclusions have dramatically reduced and the quality of teaching is improving. The academy uses the pupil premium funding to provide support intervention, fund computer tablets and a range of activities that are now beginning to improve the achievement of these students.
- The restructuring of the academy day has enabled leaders to provide better support for teaching through weekly sessions to improve teachers' skills in the classroom. The systems for checking on how well teachers are doing are robust. Observations of teaching to check its quality are frequent. There is regular coaching for staff to raise performance. Given that the quality of teaching mainly requires improvement, the impact of these actions is yet to be fully embedded in practice.

■ There are good partnerships, particular with the girls' grammar school. This allows greater links in working collaboratively to strengthen the quality of teaching, learning opportunities and raising students' aspirations. For example, a number of students have been accepted to complete their sixth form studies at the grammar school which accepts both genders, leading to the raised aspirations of many boys and girls.

■ **The governance of the academy:**

- The 'trustees' (members of the governing body), and sponsors are committed to the success of the academy. They bring considerable expertise and have provided funding for the academy's new building. The executive principal has strengthened the educational expertise and the trustees now hold the academy to account for the performance of different groups of learners. For example, they recently challenged the funding, strategies and use of the pupil premium to enhance learning. They use a range of data to develop an understanding of how the academy's performance compares to that of schools locally and nationally. There is a clear awareness of the quality of teaching, of how any underperformance is tackled and how staff who perform well are rewarded. The trustees ensure that the funding of the pupil premium is spent on a range of strategies and interventions that are specifically for these students. This includes staffing, mentoring and individual support. The trustees are committed to their own professional development in exercising their duties. At the time of the inspection, all statutory safeguarding requirements were met.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	135305
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	402684

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	454
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gerry Pack
Executive Principal	Jane Robinson
Principal	Nicki Mattin
Date of previous school inspection	19–20 May 2010
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